

Hospitality industry a leading employer in Kenya

A grim picture has recently been presented in a survey by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS); that a whopping seven million Kenyans currently unemployed with only 1.4 million desperately looking for work. The dire times have resulted in the other 5.6 million giving up on job hunting altogether.

 By Josephine Wawira 21 Sep 2018



In a country where nine in every 10 unemployed Kenyans are 35 years and below, the survey depicts a desperate unemployed youth. A huge chunk of these are aged between 20 and 24 years and are not engaged in any work or business.

However, not all is bad news in the KNBS report. The unemployment rate for the entire population has come down to 7.4% from 9.7% in 2009 and 12.7% in 2005. Additionally, 19.5 million Kenyans are active in the workforce albeit majority of them being in low-cadre, poor-paying jobs.

Can the hospitality industry salvage the horrific unemployment numbers in Kenya especially among the youth?

The industry is not only a multifaceted sector that contributes to a variety of economic activities but is also labour intensive and thus a major generator of employment, accounting for about 9 per cent of total formal employment in 2017.

As is the case in many other developing countries, the hospitality industry is a key driver of Kenya's socio economic development. As such it is important for job seekers and entrepreneurs to understand each sector before venturing into it for employment.

Travel and tourism

This sector involves providing a memorable vacation experience and transportation – flights, train, public service vehicles, off-road car hires, etc.

Kenya is well endowed with a variety of touristic points of interest ranging from white sandy beaches to national parks, museums, and mountains. These attractions consequently drew 1.4million foreign visitors in 2017 with 68% of them having travelled for leisure.

Being the chief segment, every 30th visitor that comes into this country creates a job for a Kenyan. The ratio is however 1 for local tourists. Jobs created by travel & tourism require a hands-on approach, top-notch efficiency and exceptional

customer service. These include but not limited to chauffeurs, pilots, flight attendants, tour guides, porters, travel advisors among others.

Accommodation

In 2016, domestic travel expenditure stood at 62% resulting in increased bed-night occupancy by 11%. Moreover, KNBS indicates that 187,000 East African residents stayed at the country's game reserves and lodges against 176,500 foreign residents over the same period.

The change in demographic has given rise to a variety of accommodation facilities that were previously limited to resorts, hotels, bed and breakfast and lodgings. This sector now includes furnished rentals, aparthotels, campgrounds, touristic villages and vacation complexes.

Jobs in the accommodation sector require people skills with extraordinary customer service. This prompts good reviews, recommendation and repeated customers.

Food and beverage

This sector offers the bulk of employment especially in a culinary destination like the coast of Kenya. F&B can be a separate or an integral component of the hospitality industry as it takes any shape ranging from independent catering establishments to a small section of an establishment such as a movie or a kids' play area.

Within the accommodation sector, F&B reigns supreme in employment. Whether the lodging is a holiday rental or an affluent hotel, the services of a chef that can offer excellent food and a waiter who serves with world-class customer service, are required.

In 2017, the hospitality industry supported 1.1 million jobs (9% of total employment), and by end of 2018, the employment rate is expected to rise by 3.1%; according to a Jumia Hospitality Report.

Regardless of the sector, without proper customer service, any business in the hospitality industry might as very well head downhill. The way the personnel serves the clients is a paramount determinant of the level of success of the industry in Kenya.

**Josephine Wawira was interviewed by Josephine Wawira.*

ABOUT JOSEPHINE WAWIRA

Josephine Wawira is a consultant in communication and public relations with over six years of progressive writing and broadcast experience. She is currently a writer for Africa's online hotel booking portal, Jumia Travel, focusing in the areas of travel, tourism, and hospitality as it relates to Africa.
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